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ABSTRACT

This digest describes teacher mentoring and its different applications. A list of 10 characteristics and activities inherent in any mentor-protege relationship is provided. A discussion is presented on the ways that mentoring, an essentally informal process, has been formalized in business firms and school systems. In considering the benefits that mentoring brings to the education system, the major benefits to both the mentor and protege are briefly discussed, and the direct and indirect benefits to the school district are pointed out. While these benefits are tangible and observable in successful mentoring programs, it is noted that there are some potential obstacles to the mentoring process, such as the injudicious matching of mentors and proteges. Descriptions are offered of two exemplary mentoring programs--the California Mentor Teacher Program, and the proposed Model School System of Louisville, Kentucky. A brief bibliography is included. (JD)

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TEACHER MENTORING

ERIC Digest # 7

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Teacher Mentoring

Mentoring is the establishment of a personal relationship for the purpose of professional instruction and guidance. Professions which use mentoring as an induction procedure for new members include medicine, social and public services, and business, particularly administration (Fagan and Walter 1982). In education, the value of mentoring has been recognized in the use of teachers and other professionals in one-on-one instruction of students for vocational education, science, and reading (Evenson 1982). More consistent with past uses of mentoring in professional initiation programs, mentoring programs have been implemented recently for beginning teacher induction and continuing staff development. This digest describes teacher mentoring and its different applications. Because of the extensive literature on mentoring available, only a representative sample of sources on studies of the mentoring process and mentoring programs has been referenced.

What are the Characteristics and Activities of Mentoring?

From the literature on mentoring in professions, Bova and Phillips (1981) compiled a list of ten characteristics inherent in any mentor-protege relationship.

1. Mentor-protege relationships grow out of voluntary interaction. This interactivity cannot be dictated; it must grow from an established relationship of trust founded on mutual affinity and

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respect.

2. The mentor-protege relationship has a life cycle: introduction; mutual trust building; teaching of risk taking, communication, and professional skills; transfer of professional standards; and dissolution.

3. Mentors become mentors in order to pass down their accumulation of information to the next generation.

4. Mentors, interested in the protege's career development, encourage the protege in setting and attaining short and long term goals.

5. Mentors guide technically and professionally. The mentor teaches the protege skills necessary to survive daily experiences and promotes career-scope professional development.

6. Mentors protect proteges from major mistakes by limiting their exposure to responsibility. This also includes protection by developing the protege's political awareness.

7. Mentors provide opportunities for proteges to observe and participate in their work.

8. Mentors are role models.

9. Mentors sponser proteges organizationally and professionally.

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The protege's activities reflect on the mentor's ability to transfer appropriate information.

10. Mentor-protege relationships do end, amiably or bitterly.

Formalizing an Informal Process

Mentoring relationships have existed among successful business initiates and wise senior personnel for as long as business has existed; many companies have formalized this traditionally informal pairing of mentor and protege to ensure that the accumulated knowledge of their executives is passed on to the next generation of executives (Phillips-Jones 1982; Lunding 1978).

Similiarly, some school systems have formalized mentoring processes as part of newly developed induction programs. Some of the characteristics of the mentor-protege relationship are necessarily compromised in school situations. Voluntary participation becomes mandatory for the protege and the sphere of influence in which the mentor would ordinarily affect the protege is decreased by time and authority restrictions. The mentor cannot regulate the beginning teacher's levels of responsibility. The mentor does not have the freedom to direct the protege's activities nor the time to adequately oversee developing classroom performance. The mentoring relationship can be supported by creating a school environment which openly offers assistance and provides the means to expand the initiate's repertoire of teaching techniques and classroom management skills. Since the organization usurps the process of mentor-protege pairing, it therefore

bears the responsibility for the assembly of congenial pairs.

What Benefits Does Mentoring Bring to the Educational System?

As an interactive system, mentoring benefits all participants: the mentor, the protege, and the school system. Mentors gain the satisfaction of being able to transfer skills and knowledge accumulated through extensive professional practice (California... 1983; Krupp 1984). Much of this knowledge is intangible, not contained in teacher preparation programs and otherwise might be lost entirely unless rediscovered by each beginner. The questions from beginning teachers provide opportunities for mentor teachers to reexamine their own classroom practices and effects of accepted instructional techniques on the teaching/learning process. Mutual observation and assessment necessary to the mentor-protege process introduces new ideas as well as reassessment and revision of old ones.

The protege benefits in three major ways: fast assimilation into the school environment, establishment of professional competence and introduction to teaching as a continually developing, lifelong career. One of the most recognized uses of mentoring is the conveyance of operating procedures to the beginner (Evenson 1982; Fagan and Walter 1982). Until the beginner acquires basic knowledge of school regulations and procedures and acts in accordance with them, the teaching function is impaired. Here the role of the mentor as a cooperating member of the school system is clear: the school administration provides an introduction to the rules and the mentor then takes over to teach the skills necessary to comply and cope with

them (Driscoll 1985). The mentor provides the protege with opportunities to develop professional competence through a cycle of observation/ assessment/practice/assessment. This permits continuous communication and constant feedback to the protege. Classroom skills develop under the mentor's constant and consistent assistance. Finally, the mentor guides the protege through the maze of local and state administration systems which potentially influence the practices of the classroom teacher and to professional organizations for academic and professional development.

The school district benefits both directly and indirectly from mentoring programs. A school which enthusiastically welcomes and initiates beginning teachers to active participation in the educational processes potentially reduces its teacher attrition rate (Driscoll 1985). Furthermore, close supervision of the beginning teacher catches problems which may affect the instructional process or discourage the teacher before these problems have a chance to produce irreversible effects. Involving experienced teachers in the program and providing them the opportunity to pass on their expertise further demonstrates long-term professional interest in the faculty and provides an environment conducive to lifelong professional careers.

Problems Common to the Implementation of Mentoring Programs

Confusing "assessment" with "evaluation" provides a common cause of mentor program failure (Griffin 1984, 1985). An effective mentoring process is built on a foundation of mutual trust. The objective of the process is assistance. Both are placed in serious jeopardy if the

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mentor is saddled with evaluation responsibilities. Assessment, however, is an important part of the mentoring process which allows the protege self-criticism and direction for improvement (California... 1983). Programs can resolve this conflict by appointing separate evaluators or evaluation teams which meet with the protege and mentor to discuss performance evaluations.

Mandatory program participation places potential obstacles to the mentoring process (Phillips-Jones 1982). Historically, mentoring has an element of happenstance, wherein mentor and protege find in each other a motivation for the mentoring activity which takes place as the team relationship evolves. Mentors are mentors because they want to be mentors. Mentors make good mentors by communicating expert skills, attitudes and professional outlook to proteges. Criteria and methods for choosing mentors, a problem common to all programs, are suggested by Driscoll in her description of the Utah Teacher Evaluation Program. The California Teacher Mentor Program (California... 1983) and the Model School project of Louisville (Benningfield 1984) offer further mentor characteristics in accordance with their added responsibilities of mentors in their programs. Proteges make good teachers by assimilating the desirable skills, attitudes, and professional outlook of their mentors. The latter is unlikely unless the beginning teachers are matched judiciously with prequalified senior teachers who share professional interests, expressed educational philosophies, and compatible personalities, thus providing an environment conducive to the cultivation of mutual interest, respect, and the subsequent formation of trust necessary to the mentoring process. However, despite the repeated emphasis in the literature on the voluntary

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quality of the mentor/protege relationship (Fagan and Walter 1982), surveys of post-program proteges and mentors repeatedly report enthusiastic support of organized mentoring programs (Krupp 1984; Huffman and Leak 1986). This would seem to indicate that schools can establish an environment for effective mentoring in mandatory programs.

Using a mentoring program to fulfill state mandated and district required certification, induction, and staff development programs loads mentoring with obligations which the technique is not designed to handle. The mentor is a guide to the profession, not a stand in for administration. Time limitations necessarily demand that observance and practice take precedence over the teaching of mundane school regulations and technical information issues which could be obtained through other sources (Driscoll et al. 1985). Mentoring is not a complete induction program.

Existing Programs: Models for Future Development

Krupp (1984) describes one of few wholly mentoring programs. This experimental program conducted in Connecticut elementary and secondary schools cultivated the spontaneous formation of mentoring relationships among teachers. An introductory seminar for all school staff motivated an interest in the mentoring process. Successive workshops for volunteer program participants provided information and guidance to mentor teachers and their proteges.

In most teacher mentoring programs, mentoring forms a basic component of a multi-purpose teacher induction program. Many induction

programs seek to qualify a new teacher for certification and permanent employment, necessitating evaluation of teaching skills and providing programs to improve those skills to pre-set standards. The literature provides many examples of these mentoring-evaluation program hybrids (see Galvez-Hjornevik 1985). Another purpose for supporting the teacher mentor/protege relationship with additional induction activities is to restore some of the benefits of professional mentoring which are necessarily curtailed by the teaching environment: time constraints and limitation of personnel interaction. Driscoll et al. (1985) discusses the problems common to the adaptation of the traditionally idealistic relationship of mentor and protege to the teacher's real world of limited time and structured activities.

The multipurpose programs come in two varieties: those using mentoring as a part of an induction process and those using mentoring as a tool for general staff development. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Career Development Program (Schlechty 1985; Hanes and Mitchell 1985) is representative of teacher induction programs which assign each new teacher to an induction committee. This "Advisory/Assessment Team" consists of a school administrator, an instructional consultant (often from a teacher preparation program of a nearby college), and a peer teacher who acts as a mentor to the beginner. These programs back up both the mentor and the protege with separate supporting activities. The system has received favorable reviews, despite the misleading use of the term "assessment": the final team "assessment" determines the employment status of the protege.

Examples of programs which use mentoring as a general approach to

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staff development are the California Mentor Teacher Program (California... 1983) and the proposed Model School System of Louisville, Kentucky (Benningfield 1984). In these specific programs, the use of "mentor" is a misnomer. Both programs professionalize the mentoring process by training senior teachers as master teachers to instruct other teachers (beginners and experienced) in advancing instructional techniques and classroom skills. Each trained "mentor" is assigned a group of "proteges." The mentor also is responsible for curriculum development and the exploration of new instructional techniques. The concept of training experienced teachers to advise and monitor a group of other teachers does not evolve from developments in the use of mentoring as much as it is derived from twenty years of induction program development (see Galvez-Hjornevik's Appendix from Zeichner-1979 1985). The California and Louisville programs borrow the best of master teacher programs and combine it with the less personnel aspects of mentoring.

The success of mentoring programs has been documented largely by opinion survey. Most of the programs using teacher mentoring are less than four years old. Long term objectives, retention of new teachers and development of experienced ones, have had insuffieient time to be realized. However, surveys of perceptions of program success overwhelmingly conclude that beginning teachers do expand their techniques, improve teaching skills, and learn classroom management (Huffman and Leak 1986). Furthermore mentors do appreciate the opportunity to and do pass their accumulated expertise on to new teachers (California... 1983; Krupp 1986). The varieties of mentoring programs described in the literature should allow any school

district to find a model which fits its budget, time, and spacial constraints.

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